



Prevalence, Perceptions and Awareness of Domestic Violence in Texas

Executive Summary

February 11, 2003



**A Quantitative Study Conducted for the
Texas Council on Family Violence
By Saurage Research, Inc.**

Sponsored by the Office of the Texas Attorney General

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The Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV) and its marketing communications team headed by Vollmer Public Relations, Inc. commissioned this study. The study is designed to meet the following objectives:

- Determine the prevalence of domestic violence in Texas.
- Measure the level of awareness of the services that are available to victims of domestic violence.
- Better understand perceptions and attitudes with respect to the issue of domestic violence and victims of domestic violence.
- Investigate the barriers to seeking assistance among victims of domestic violence.

Saurage Research, Inc. of Houston, Texas conducted the survey and randomly selected 1,200 respondents for telephone interviews from August 7 through August 24, 2002. The survey has a 2.8 percent margin of error.

Domestic Violence Prevalence in Texas

There are a number of ways the Texas Council on Family Violence statewide survey evaluated the prevalence of domestic abuse in Texas.

- **Personal and Family**
 - Survey respondents were asked whether they or an immediate family member have experienced domestic abuse.
- **Personal, Family, Friends and Co-workers**
 - In addition to themselves or immediate family members, respondents also were asked whether friends or co-workers have experienced domestic abuse.

TCFV also evaluated Texans' personal experience with domestic violence in two ways:

- The broad term "domestic violence" refers to anyone who has experienced any of the following forms of abuse: physical abuse, such as hitting, choking or slapping; sexual abuse; threats made against themselves or their family; verbal abuse, including name-calling and public humiliation; and forced isolation from friends and family.
- For the purposes of this analysis, we are defining "severe abuse" as experiencing at least one of the following: physical abuse, sexual abuse or having a spouse or dating partner threaten them or their family.

Key Findings:

Personal, Family, Friends and Co-worker Prevalence

- **74 percent** of all Texans indicate that they, a family member and/or a friend or coworker have experienced some form of domestic violence (physical, sexual or verbal) in their lifetime.
 - **49 percent** of all Texans report that they have either personally been *severely* abused or report that a family member has been a victim of domestic violence.

Personal and Family Prevalence

- **31 percent** of all Texans report that they have been *severely* abused at some point in their lifetime. Women report severe abuse at a higher rate than men.
 - **26 percent** report that they have been physically abused (hit, slapped, pushed or choked by a partner);
 - **27 percent** of women report physical abuse;
 - **24 percent** of men report these experiences.
 - **11 percent** indicate that they have been forced to have sex against their will;
 - **14 percent** of women report forced sex;
 - **3 percent** of men report this experience.
 - **19 percent** say a partner has threatened them or their family.
 - **20 percent** of women report threats;
 - **16 percent** of men report this behavior.
- **47 percent** of all Texans report having personally experienced at least one form of domestic violence, either severe abuse, verbal abuse, and/or forced isolation from friends and family at some point in their lifetime.
 - **29 percent** have experienced public humiliation by their partner;
 - **19 percent** have been intentionally isolated from family and friends;
 - **41 percent** have been subjected to name-calling. More men than women report being called names. This is the only category of abuse in which men report at a higher rate than women.
 - **50 percent** of men have been called names;
 - **37 percent** of women report this behavior.
 - **40 percent** of respondents directly identified themselves or a family member's identification as a victim of domestic violence. **35 percent** of these respondents indicate that they did nothing about the abuse.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Domestic Violence is an epidemic in Texas. The results from this survey are compatible with national studies indicating that one-third of all women will be physically or sexually abused in their lifetime. This study suggests that more than four million Texans have been severely abused (defined as physical abuse, sexual abuse or threats) by their intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.

The Texas Department of Human Services estimates that there were nearly 900,000 victims of domestic violence in Texas last year. In 2002, more than two women per week were killed by their intimate partner.

There aren't sufficient resources and/or domestic violence services to help every victim of severe abuse in our state. In fact, Texas domestic violence programs annually serve approximately only five percent of the state's victims and, last year, 18 percent of the adult victims requesting shelter in our state could not receive it due to lack of space.

More resources will be needed if we are to address this epidemic and meet the incredible need for domestic violence programs indicated by this study. While resources for domestic violence programs are critical, we will never be able to provide services to all victims of severe abuse, let alone victims of verbal and other forms of abuse, so we must emphasize preventing domestic violence before it begins and ending it where it exists.

- Female and male respondents to this survey indicated relatively equal rates of domestic abuse. While women reported higher levels of severe abuse, it is clear that for both women and men in Texas, violence is increasingly becoming a common way for couples to communicate with one another. That cannot continue if we are going to end domestic violence. A language of equality and respect for one another must replace this language of violence that too many Texans are practicing in their relationships.

Whether women or men, all victims of domestic violence face barriers to getting help, and all batterers share the same goal of using force to control and intimidate their partner in order to get what they want. All victims of domestic abuse deserve emergency assistance when needed, and friends and family who will listen to them, respect them and know how to find the help they need. In all of our efforts, we must make progress toward ending every form of domestic violence regardless of who it affects.

National studies have consistently indicated that women are severely injured or killed as a result of intimate partner violence significantly more often than men. Women are far more likely than men to be raped and/or physically assaulted by an intimate partner, and are up to fourteen times more likely to suffer severe physical assault from an intimate partner (*National Institute of Justice; 1998*). Domestic violence is the number one cause of injury requiring serious medical attention for women ages 18-49 -- more than car accidents, rapes, and mugging combined (*Alpert, E.J. et. al.; 1998*). Additionally, in 1998, women were nearly three out of four victims of the 1,830 murders attributable to intimate partners. The percentage of female murder victims killed by intimate partners has remained at about 30 percent since 1976 (*Bureau of Justice Statistics; May, 2000*).

This is the first-ever statewide quantitative survey assessing the prevalence of domestic violence in Texas. Additional research is needed to fully understand the nature and extent of the abuse that Texas men have experienced, the causes of that abuse, and the response of the victim to those experiences.

- Three-quarters of all Texans have been personally affected by domestic violence. A person doesn't have to have been abused themselves to be personally affected by domestic violence. Anyone who knows of a friend or family member that has been abused by someone claiming to love them, experiences pain, regret and loss over what their loved one is going through or has been through. It is rare to find an issue that has personally touched so many people's lives.

Additionally, domestic violence is related to many other issues that are troubling for our society. Studies indicate that up to one-half of all homeless women and children are victims of domestic violence. Children who grow up with domestic violence are much more likely to perpetrate violence. Husbands who batter their wives are far more likely to also abuse their children. Victims of domestic violence often turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with the terror of domestic violence. All of this information suggests that even for the 25 percent of Texans who do not know someone who is a victim of domestic violence, this very serious issue personally affects **every Texan**.

Texans' Perceptions of Domestic Violence

Key Findings:

- A majority of Texans demonstrate a willingness to blame victims for being abused and limit the options available to those in abusive relationships.
 - **29 percent** of Texans disagreed with the following statement: “Victims who do not leave an abusive relationship share some of the blame for their abuse.”
 - **80 percent** of respondents believe it is *never* appropriate to remain in an abusive relationship.
 - **63 percent** of respondents indicated that they were not aware that leaving a relationship could be more dangerous than staying.
- **79 percent** of Texans define hitting, slapping, pushing and/or choking as domestic violence, yet less than one-third of Texans defined behaviors such as shouting and cursing, name-calling and put downs, threatening someone, stalking, and sexual abuse as domestic violence.
 - Surprisingly few Texans (**3.5 percent**) named forcing an intimate partner to have sex against their will as an act of domestic violence, and even fewer identified threatening one’s partner or family, stalking, or intentionally isolating one’s partner from friends and family as forms of domestic violence.
- Texans demonstrate a willingness to blame domestic violence on circumstances beyond an abuser’s control, rather than acknowledge the abuser’s culpability.
 - **54 percent** of Texans indicate a belief that being poor increases the likelihood of domestic violence;
 - **49 percent** of Texans believe that a *victim’s* lack of education increases the likelihood of abuse;
 - **50 percent** of Texans believe that an *abuser’s* lack of education increases the likelihood of abuse;
 - **86 percent** of Texans are willing to blame sudden financial problems or job loss for the abuse;
 - **98 percent** of Texans are willing to blame alcohol or drug abuse for the abuse.
 - **46 percent** of Texans failed to disagree with the following statement: “Abusive behavior is generally caused by circumstances and events beyond the abuser’s control.”
 - **35 percent** of Texans did not recognize that a person can choose to stop abusing.

- **75 percent** of Texans report that they would be likely to call the police if they were to experience domestic violence. Yet only 20.3 percent indicated that they actually did contact law enforcement when they or a family member actually had experienced domestic violence.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Texans show a tragic willingness to blame victims for the abuse they suffer. There are many reasons why victims of domestic violence often fail to obtain help, even after years of suffering. One of the most prevalent and critical of these barriers is that victims don't trust that people will believe their stories of abuse and that people will blame them for the crime perpetrated against them.

Texans are perplexed that someone who is abused by her or partner doesn't walk out on the batterer. "Why didn't she leave?" is a common question concerning domestic violence, and it is based on the false assumption that leaving means safety.

One national study revealed that half of the homicides of female spouses and partners were committed by male batterers after their partners left (*Barbara Hart, April, 1992*). Domestic violence shelters with security cameras, locked doors, bars on the window and confidential locations exist because of the very real danger faced by someone leaving an abusive relationship. Women often fail to leave an abusive relationship because of fear -- fear for their lives, fear for the safety of their children, fear of homelessness. This doesn't even begin to address the many reasons why leaving an abusive relationship isn't always the best solution for a victim. Often the batterer is a parent and any decision to take children away from one of their parents is difficult. Finally, these are relationships that were initiated because of two people believing that they loved one another. Often a victim of abuse has not stopped loving his or her partner.

In reality, leaving doesn't mean safety at all. We want to believe it is that simple -- that driving away is the reasonable thing to do. We want to blame victims when they don't take action, yet by doing so we can cause victims to lose self-esteem, to fear admitting their abuse to the only people in their lives who might help them, or to fear reporting the abuse to the authorities. By blaming the victim, we often prevent her or him from finding safety.

- Texans' definition of domestic violence is limited. Many Texans fail to include in their definition of domestic violence several behaviors that victims often report are more difficult to deal with and/or recover from than physical abuse. Shockingly few Texans identify stalking, sexual abuse, threatening one's partner or family or intentionally isolating victims from contact with those who might help them as forms of domestic violence. Yet these behaviors create intense fear for those

experiencing them. That fear is the method of control the batterer uses to get what he or she wants.

By failing to identify these behaviors as domestic violence, Texans suggest to batterers that they can “get away with” these behaviors and they indicate to victims that any abuse that is not direct physical assault won’t be taken seriously. This limited definition of domestic violence presents a very serious barrier to the goal of holding batterers accountable for their behavior and helping victims of domestic violence find safety and the opportunity for self-sufficiency.

- Too many Texans hold beliefs about domestic violence that present barriers to holding batterers accountable for their behavior. While 94 percent of Texans acknowledge that domestic violence is a crime, nearly all respondents to the survey demonstrated a willingness to blame circumstances beyond the batterer’s control for their behavior, including **lack of education, being poor, loss of job or sudden financial problems and alcohol and drug abuse**. By blaming these external factors for domestic violence, Texans deny the culpability of the abuser.

Some of the factors listed above, including sudden financial problems and alcohol and drug abuse, *can* exacerbate an already abusive relationship, or increase the severity of abuse. But these are not the factors *responsible* for that behavior.

Stories of domestic violence are horrifying to all of us and it is natural to want to find an excuse for someone hurting the person they claim to love. But we can’t make excuses. Abusive behavior is a choice made by the batterer to use force and intimidation to obtain what he or she wants. Batterers *can* choose to stop. To end domestic violence, batterers must be held accountable for their actions and all Texans must refuse to tolerate any form of abusive behavior despite the circumstances and/or background of the abusive partner.

- Texans fail to recognize the sometimes insurmountable obstacles victims face that prevent them from reporting their abuse to the police. Family violence is believed to be the most common, yet least reported, crime in the country. In Texas, while there were an estimated 900,000 victims of domestic violence last year, according to the Texas Department of Human Services, only 194,000 *incidences* of domestic violence were reported to the police, and often one victim makes multiple incidence reports over the course of a year.

Three-quarters of Texans believe they would call the police if they or a member of their family were abused. Yet of those Texans who reported experiencing severe domestic violence or having a family member who had been abused, only one-fifth actually did contact the authorities.

Victims fear that contacting the authorities will lead to an increase in the severity of abuse or cause a batterer to attempt – sometimes successfully – homicide.

Immigrant women fear they may be deported or lose their green card if they contact the authorities, despite the fact that the federal Violence Against Women Act makes domestic violence services available to women without regard to their immigration status. Some cultures within our state are less trustful of law enforcement because of a history of discrimination or lack of understanding of cultural practices or identity. Many women don't want to have to take their children to visit their father in jail. These are natural fears, for which there is no easy solution. Education about these barriers to contacting the police and alternative courses to safety for those victims who cannot overcome these barriers is critical to best serve survivors of domestic violence.

Domestic Violence Awareness in Texas

Key Findings:

- **73 percent** of survey respondents recalled hearing or seeing something in the media about domestic violence in the past year.
 - 45.4 percent of respondents heard about domestic violence in a TV newscast. The second most likely place to have heard about domestic violence was in a newspaper story (14.5 percent).
 - As income level increases, so does the likelihood that a person has recently seen or heard something about domestic violence. **39 percent** of Texans with an annual household income of less than \$25,000 could not recall having heard anything about domestic violence in the media in the past year.
- A vast majority (**95 percent**) of Texans understand that domestic violence is a crime.
- **73 percent** of all Texans believe that domestic violence is a serious problem in Texas.
- **84 percent** of all respondents report that they believe they can *personally* do something about domestic violence.
 - **51 percent** of all Texas residents have donated time, money, or household goods to a women's shelter. Those who indicated that they have experienced an episode of domestic violence are more likely to have donated to a shelter than those who have not.
 - **78 percent** of all Texans said they would be more likely to vote for a political candidate who helped victims of domestic violence.
 - Women are more likely than men to believe that domestic violence is a serious problem within our state (75.4 percent of women indicated that domestic violence is a serious problem; 65.9 percent of men indicated the same).

- **60 percent** of all Texans feel that the state of Texas does not do enough for victims of domestic violence. 25 percent of respondents were not familiar enough with the state's domestic violence services to provide a response to this question. Only one percent of Texans feel that the state does too much for victims of domestic violence.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

- Texans understand that domestic violence is a serious problem in our state. The fact that virtually all Texans say that domestic violence is a crime represents a major accomplishment for the Battered Women's Movement. Twenty-five years ago, when the Texas Council on Family Violence was created, domestic violence was something that was kept "hidden" from public view. People didn't talk about it and many laws protecting victims of domestic violence were not in place. In 1980, the Texas Legislature appropriated the first state money to domestic violence programs, providing only \$188,699 to six domestic violence programs. As of January 1, 2002 there were 70 domestic violence shelter centers, 4 nonresidential domestic violence centers and 27 special projects serving victims of domestic violence, that received state funding.

Texans' awareness of domestic violence as a crime and their understanding that it is a serious issue that must be addressed is largely responsible for the increase in services available to victims. Yet Texans clearly understand that more can and should be done to help victims of domestic violence. In fact, 60 percent of respondents to this survey believe that Texas doesn't do enough to help survivors and their families. Texans must voice this opinion publicly and often to encourage our elected leaders to increase resources available to local domestic violence programs and to fund domestic violence prevention efforts like public education.

- The good news is that a vast majority (84 percent) of Texans believe that they can make a difference in efforts to end domestic violence. Already, many Texans are taking action to make that difference. More than half of all Texans report having donated time, money or goods to a local domestic violence program. That is a positive step. In these times of economic uncertainty, we cannot abandon the local shelters and programs that provide 24-hour emergency protection, food, clothing, legal assistance, crisis intervention, job training, transitional housing, transportation and childcare to victims of domestic violence who are trying to reestablish their lives free from violence and fear.

More than three-quarters of all Texans showed a willingness to vote for a candidate who has expressed an interest in helping victims of domestic violence. In addition to giving their personal time and resources to end domestic violence, Texans can identify candidates who will do more to help break the cycle of abuse.

But much more can, and must, be done in order to turn the tide against the epidemic of domestic violence that this survey quantifies. Public awareness efforts must continue in order to help domestic violence survivors find their way to safety. The public must become acutely aware of the tragic consequences domestic violence has on our families, friends, workplaces and communities. They must rid themselves of many of the senseless misperceptions that exacerbate the barriers that block domestic violence survivors' pathways to safety. Far too many Texans know someone who is a victim of domestic violence. We all must help these survivors find safety, receive justice and create opportunities for them to live the violence-free lives they deserve.

Survey Methodology

In designing a quantitative study to define and clarify the major issues outlined in the previous chapter, it was determined that the Texas Council on Family Violence would need data from a stratified, representative sample of households. A quantitative telephone interview methodology was employed to gather data analyzed for this research effort. Respondents surveyed are representative of households located in the state of Texas. An oversample of Hispanic households was utilized in order to ensure that sufficient data (N=350) in this critical target market was attained.

Sample Design

Sample design was an important component of this phase of the research plan and was considered relative to cost and the acceptable rate of error. In this case, for the target completion sample size of $N=1,200$ in a worst-case scenario, a binomial response (50:50) to any question will yield a ± 2.8 percent rate of error at the 95 percent level of confidence, which is well within the acceptable range. As sample size decreases, rate of error increases.

A Table of Random Sampling Error Ranges is attached to this document as a tool to assist in reviewing results of this quantitative research phase.

Sample Frame

In order to obtain an appropriate random sample, Saurage Research, Inc. based all interview calls for the telephone portion of this study on a random digit dialing (RDD) sample generated from working telephone exchanges and blocks to ensure completely random selection, regardless of whether a telephone number was listed. The commercially-maintained sample was segmented by zip code and provided in the format of several replicates, or mini-samples, of the total sample. The research firm used a sample frame of 14,400 base telephone numbers to complete a target sample of $N=1,200$. This sample was ordered in five replicates of approximately 2,880 numbers each. Regardless of the number of replicates exhausted, results of completed observations reveal accurate and proportionate

representation within each area per household demographics. Our telephone sampling requirements allow for four callbacks before permanently discarding one telephone number and selecting another for inclusion in the sample. This system allows us to decrease the bias, which occurs because some individuals are more likely to be home, more likely to respond to telephone questionnaires, more opinionated and so forth.

Interviewing procedures for this 10-minute survey (+/-2 minutes) were conducted on the dates of August 7 through August 24, 2002 during the evening hours of weekdays and on the weekend to eliminate bias toward unemployed members of households. A total of 27,227 attempts (including wrong numbers, busy signals, no answers and nonworking telephone numbers) were made to obtain 1,272 completions, providing a secondary incidence rate of 4.4 percent. A primary incidence rate of 12.0 percent was achieved by virtue of the 10,020 connections made (these include terminations, non-qualified respondents and refusals). A copy of the survey instrument used to interview Texas residents can be found in Appendix A.

Survey Instrument Design

Designing a survey instrument is one of the more critical components in the marketing research process. Saurage Research conducts only highly customized questionnaire design, and does not subscribe to using template questionnaires. The survey instrument is designed uniquely, although it may include some very standard question areas. Questions presented to respondents must be clear, unambiguous, concise and relevant; the answers must be translatable into useful information. Questions must be asked in objective fashion in order to obtain responses which are truly representative. Once the project management team discussed critical issues that were to be handled within the research program, Saurage Research developed a questionnaire that met our strict survey design standards:

- **Comprehensive Issues Coverage**

All questions relevant to pertinent issues were addressed within the context of the research project. Proposed questions that gained irrelevant information were eliminated from the survey instrument while other concerns were challenged, often using multiple methodologies, in order to secure true perceptions as expressed by the sample population.

- **Objective Presentation of Questions**

Questions were presented objectively to avoid any bias. Bias is a factor that can alter the results, negatively affect key findings, and render any action taken as ineffective. A tremendous amount of effort was exerted during the questionnaire design phase to avoid any possibility of bias within the survey instrument.

- **Succinct Wording**

In order to maintain heightened interest by the survey respondent and to reduce the level of respondent fatigue, the questions on the survey instrument were specific so as to avoid confusing or misleading respondents. Each question was designed, pretested, and recomposed to assure a fluid and dynamic interaction with the respondent being interviewed.

- **Useful Response Results**

Information that is useful translates into effective marketing strategies and promotional planning. Although a question may be deemed critical by management for inclusion on a survey instrument, the answer may not be useful in providing direction for action. Therefore, we developed, pretested, and restructured questions so that resulting information might be of the type that can be assimilated into the client's plan of goals and objectives.

Data Collection Procedures

Saurage Research, Inc. utilized a professional, experienced CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) field service provider for the data collection associated with this project. Our data collection specifications are quite strict and disallow any unprofessional practices (*e.g.*, calling persons already known to the interviewer, using a less-than-courteous tone of voice, skipping questions, paraphrasing a respondent's answer). Verification procedures are 15 percent minimum; 100 percent proofing and editing is standard for all work conducted. Saurage Research supervised the field service provider to maintain optimal accuracy in all work completed. All interviewing staff were thoroughly trained on every aspect of the survey instruments before they began data collection. However, prior to data collection procedures, the telephone questionnaire was pretested ($n = 25$) and reviewed to avert problems with ambiguity and question confusion.

Data Verification

Following the completion of the CATI data collection process, highly structured coding and data verification procedures were used to ensure high-quality data. In addition, all variables and values were checked to verify that they were within appropriate ranges and that inappropriate multivariate outliers were corrected. Answers to opened-end questions were grouped according to their intrinsic relationship to one another. In this manner, response derivations that are usable were developed so that the amount of information available in the original large set of variables was retained in the smaller, more manageable number of factors. At this juncture, data were introduced into a customized client database, in ASCII format, and were verified once again, using the SPSS system. A full statistical analysis followed, using SPSS. Unless instructed to permanently remove data from magnetic media, one verified, permanent copy of the raw data and execution program will be stored in our permanent archives upon completion of this research program.

Statistical Analysis of Data

Saurage Research, Inc. uses nonparametric as well as bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques in conducting data analyses for quantitative studies. Initially, we conducted rather standardized data analysis procedures by reviewing descriptive frequency counts and cross-tabulations of responses for variables of interest and perceptual significance. Responses based on Likert scales were analyzed through a mean average procedure that often provides more useful information than a multiple-category response. In some cases, the response options included in the Likert scales were collapsed into fewer groups for a clearer and more concise analysis.

- Percentages and cross-tabulations were completed to understand individuals' perceptions based on ethnicity, relationship status, gender, annual household income, and religious affiliation.
- Another multivariate statistical method called cluster analysis was used to arrange similar questions or individuals into groups different from each other to maximize differences between groups (heterogeneity), while minimizing differences within groups (homogeneity).

Bullets are used throughout this report to identify significant findings based on statistical tests. Upon reviewing statistically significant and substantively significant relationships that occur throughout the data, specifically targeted conclusions have been made to assist in understanding the results of analysis. If sub-analysis is required after client review of initial research results, this will be generated in prompt fashion.

Statistical Notes

All descriptive information and analytical findings presented in this document reflect the use of nonparametric as well as bivariate and multivariate statistical techniques. However, to maintain real-world usability of these research findings, statistics are most often provided in terms of absolute number of responses, percentages and mean averages. Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses. Also, some respondents did not answer all questions, usually because of questionnaire design and contingency patterns. Therefore, base numbers may differ among the various quantitative questions presented.